

First Presbyterian Church, Marianna, Florida

Lenten Luncheons Lent 2007

Reflections on the Cross of Jesus

by Huw Christopher, Pastor

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

The Jerusalem Cross

Hymn: “At the Cross” stanzas 1 and 2 and refrains

A few weeks ago after our washing machine had died Rachel and I were in Lowes looking for a new one. As we were checking out a young man who was working there came up to Rachel and said, “I have cross like that and I know what it means.” The cross she happened to be wearing that day is one that many of you have probably seen her wear on other occasions. It is the cross that was featured on the front of our bulletin last Sunday and now on our banner today. It is called the Jerusalem Cross. In talking with that young man at Lowes it appeared that he had been given that cross at a conference he had been attending. The particular one that Rachel was wearing that day was one that she had been given at one of the first continuing education conferences that she and I attended when we were beginning our ministry in Washington, North Carolina. We came to Atlanta to a Serendipity Conference in the mid-1970s led by Lyman Coleman who had written so much of the Serendipity material at that time. As part of the closing commitment service everyone was given a Jerusalem Cross. I do not recall any particular significance being given at that time to the fact that the cross that was given out was a Jerusalem Cross. I think that it was just intended to be a reminder

to us of the conference. When Rachel wears her Jerusalem Cross I often wonder what may have happened to the one I was given. While I was pastor in the Washington Church I had a young man who frequently would come by the church looking for help. One day when he was in my office he saw my Jerusalem Cross and decided that this was one that he would like. I hope that he may still have it and that it may be a reminder to him of the help I sought to give to him over thirty years ago. Some of you may have seen Rachel wear a smaller fancier version of the Jerusalem Cross. This one also has great significance for her because she purchased it when we were visiting in Jerusalem as part of our trip to the Holy Land in the year 2000.

The Jerusalem Cross has sometimes been called the Crusaders' Cross since it was the coat of arms of Godfrey de Bouillon, who became the first Christian ruler of Jerusalem in 1099. Godfrey organized the Knights of France, Normandy and Flanders in what turned out to be the second crusade to conquer Jerusalem from the Muslims. It is not clear why he choose the Jerusalem Cross.

As you look at the Jerusalem Cross on the banner in front of me this morning I would invite you to think about some of the various interpretations which have been given to this cross.

Some suggest that the five crosses represent the five principalities which made up the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem during the Crusades. Another interpretation is that the five crosses symbolize the five nations which eventually went on the crusades to free the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem, namely, England, France, Italy, Spain and Germany.

Another tradition says that the cross was designed after an Armenian crutch cross Godfrey found somewhere in Asia Minor. This tradition suggests that he liked the old design which was symbolic of pilgrims who leaned on their crutches as they prayed. We do know that later the crusaders established the Knight Templar to protect such pilgrims and that the Knights Hospitaler were concerned

about caring for pilgrims who became ill on their journeys to the Holy Land. For some people these associations have caused the Jerusalem Cross to be called the Cross Potent, and its resemblance to an ancient crutch to become a reminder of the fact that God's nature is salvation, seeking to bring healing and wholeness to that which is ill or "dis-eased," and seeking to make whole that which is broken, handicapped or impaired of body, mind or spirit.

Some people have seen here in addition to the crutch symbol of healing that the four larger crosses are seen as Tau or T crosses which are sometimes called the Old Testament Cross or the Cross of Prophecy or the Cross of Anticipation. It is sometimes associated with the bronze serpent that Moses held up on a stick as a sign of healing for the people of Israel in the wilderness. The four smaller, Greek crosses, are then seen to be symbols of the four Gospels which have displaced the Mosaic law, depicted by the Tau crosses. In this way the Jerusalem Cross is seen as the symbol of the fact that as Christians we have passed from the "Law of Moses" to the "Love and Grace of God" revealed through Christ's death on the cross.

Other people looking at the cross have seen the way in which it speaks to them of the suffering of our Lord on the cross. In particular they have seen the large square cross as representing the wound in the side of Jesus, and the four smaller Greek crosses to refer to the wounds in his hands and his feet as he was hung on the cross to die for us.

I do not recall exactly what the young man in Lowes said about how he interpreted this Jerusalem Cross but I think he said that the large cross was seen as being representative of Jerusalem, and then the four smaller Greek crosses were seen as the four points on the compass or the four corners of the earth. In this way the cross is often called a Cross of Witness reminding us of the way in which the Christian faith has spread as the Risen Jesus promised because of the witness of his followers first in Jerusalem and then in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of

